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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [SNAR](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [FI](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN FREES FINNISH PEACEKEEPER'S KILLERS

REF: A. REF A: THOME-EUR/NB E-MAILS
[1](#)B. MAY 2007
[1](#)C. REF B: HELSINKI 817
[1](#)D. REF C: HELSINKI 753
[1](#)E. REF D: HELSINKI 715

Classified By: PolChief Gregory Thome, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The GoF continues to receive unsatisfactory answers from the GoA as to why President Karzai suddenly ordered the release of five Afghan men convicted in June for detonating a roadside bomb that killed a Finnish peacekeeper in Meymenah. Unofficial reports from Afghanistan-based Finnish officers all seem to point to prisoner abuse and to corruption that may include top Karzai Government officials. The Finnish MFA and MOD remain fully committed to Finland's participation in ISAF and still hope it will increase in [1](#)2008. However, with a divided GOF engaged in a sharp debate over the question of Finland's doing more in Afghanistan, many officials fear the killers' release could negatively impact public opinion. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND

[1](#)2. (U) In May, a roadside bomb killed one Finnish soldier and wounded three Norwegians who were serving in ISAF's Meymenah Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Faryab Province (Ref A). In June, Afghan authorities convicted seven men in connection with the attack, originally condemning them to death but later reducing their sentence to 20 years in prison. However, to the GoF's great surprise, the GoA abruptly freed five of the seven men in October, after President Karzai apparently issued them a pardon. Two remain in prison.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Karzai's pardon of men the Finns still hold responsible for the deadly attack has prompted great concern on the highest level. Finland's ambassador to Kabul has met with senior MFA and MOJ officials there, and on Nov. 29 President Tarja Halonen summoned the Afghan Ambassador to Finland (resident in Oslo) to express her concern about the matter and seek an explanation. The GoF has also been in close communication with Norwegian officials, who we understand sent their MFA's political director to Kabul to seek answers from the Afghan attorney general.

PRISONER MISTREATMENT AND CORRUPTION

[1](#)4. (C) Despite the high-level efforts, however, the GoF has learned very little from the GoA. According to the Finnish press, Afghan Ambassador Jawed Ludin told President Halonen that President Karzai believed that the men did not receive a fair trial, and pardoned them

on that basis. He assured her that further investigation, a full report, and possibly a new trial would follow. However, MFA Undersecretary for Political Affairs Markus Lyra told DCM and PolChief privately that, in fact, Ludin's comments to the President were evasive and occasionally defensive. In effect "he really didn't address the issue in detail at all," Lyra reported. Other Finnish officials have met with similarly unsatisfying Afghan responses. The Finnish Embassy's formal diplomatic notes seeking a general explanation have gone unanswered in Kabul, and the MFA has now provided its Ambassador a series of specific questions along with instructions to seek meetings with the attorney general and officials in Karzai's office to get them answered, Lyra reported. Other Finnish contacts also told us that the Norwegian Political Director's meeting with the Afghan attorney general went very poorly; apparently the AG became quite angry and ended the meeting abruptly, saying simply that the five were probably released in accordance with the Afghan tradition of pardoning some criminals to commemorate the Eid-al-Fitr holiday.

15. (C) Informally at other levels, Finnish military and civilian officers in Afghanistan have pieced together a picture of what they believe really happened. Although at times contradictory, the information they have gathered points to probable prisoner mistreatment before the sentencing and corruption in connection with the pardon, perhaps even on the highest level. According to the MFA office director for Central Asia, the seven men were guilty, as far as the Finns can determine. But they were also mistreated by police and imprisoned without a real trial. (The Finns believe a judge may have simply signed the conviction, and later the order to commute the sentence from death to 20 years, based on a recommendation from police.) Most disturbing of all, he added, money changed hands in connection with the pardon -- with the clearest indication being that two of the seven, whose families could not find sufficient funds, remain imprisoned.

COMMENT

16. (C) GoF officials are not naive about the corruption, executive interference and other abuses that may be commonplace within the Afghan judicial system. However, their search for something resembling a plausible official answer in this case stems in part from a desire to ensure that the event does not prompt an outburst of negative Finnish public opinion toward participation in the ISAF mission. Finland has been engaged for months in a vigorous public debate over the question of whether or not to increase its commitments in Afghanistan -- and the GoF is deeply divided on the political level (see reftels). Clearly, the MOD and MFA officials who favor such increases do not want the arbitrary freeing of a peacekeeper's killers to become part of the public debate.

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